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Short story comparison: “The Lady or the Tiger” vs. “Thank you Ma’am.”

In this shorts stories by Frank Stockton (The Lady or The Tiger) and Langston Hughes (Thank you Ma’am) respectively we can appreciate the thought of power of an individual over others. In each of the stories power and its influence over destiny is seen throughout the whole of the narration. Power is being represented by King in “The Lady or The Tiger” (also by the princess to a lesser degree) and by Mrs. Jones in “Thank you Ma’am. Although we might speculate that their respective powers come from their positions, the kings being a king and Mrs. Jones being a woman, in actuality their power comes from a much deeper place.

In the case of the king, his power emanates from his semi-barbaric roots and his own ambitions. On the other hand Mrs. Jones comes from her experience with life and how she has decided to live it. Both powers stem from circumstances embedded into their personality. Thus we might imply that their power comes from their deep, complex and yet elegant inner characters. Also this by itself doesn’t do as much, it is the decisions they make and their acceptance of the consequences that give their characters the strength to be considered true power.

We can also note the theme of justice. While the king leaves justice to a few circumstances and makes “fate” the judge and jury, Mrs. Jones makes her own justice giving out advice, and sharing her things with an attitude of abundance and prosperity.   
  
On the other hand the king administers justice in part for his own amusement and to amuse his people. He knows the heart of the people and gives them an emotional ride were they channel their own lives. He gives them compassion and blood, while at the same time exculpating himself of any reproach as its fate who decides who lives and who doesn’t. Mrs. Jones being the empathic mother type gives the boy a completely new perspective on life and how should one carry oneself through it. In both cases we find two characters with real powerful attitudes that become very influential. Yet their views on life and the ways to proceed are vastly different.

Both these stories explore different sides of the human psyche and the authors leave the reader the task of deciding what the outcome is going to be. This is done by another party affected by the influence of the main characters. The king with his semi-barbaric nature, allows the daughter to watch as her lover becomes a pawn of fate, while indirectly making her choose if to save or kill him. While Mrs. Jones actions are completely on the moral side and might encourage a life of goodness in the boy, we can never be sure if the experience was strong enough for him to change his ways. This is to be understood when we find out, he never saw her again.

As for the literary theories used in these short stories we can mention a few. In “Thank you Ma’am” particularly we can identify feminism. It’s shown as Mrs. Jones didn’t need the help of anyone but herself to solve the situation she found herself in. Added to the fact that she taker charge of said situation and turns it around to the advantage of whom she sees fit. It’s her game and it’s played by her rules. Both stories share many literary theories. Worth noting are existentialism, as both stories ponder around the situations of human psyche and behavior. Archetypal, Mrs. Jones being the quintessential mother figure. Psychoanalytical, as the princess finds herself in a struggle to let her lover live or die. The boy in “Thank you Ma’am” stars evaluating himself and behaving differently.